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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

MEMORANDUM

14 July 1980

Japanese Views of US Nonproliferation Policy

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Summary

Japan is among those countries most committed to the prevention of the spread of nuclear weapons. At the same time, concern about energy security leads Tokyo to question certain elements of US nonproliferation policy, especially those that might threaten the establishment by Japan of an independent nuclear fuel cycle. Japan will consult with Washington before it builds a second reprocessing plant.

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While the accumulation of spent fuel assemblies spurs Japanese interest in a second plant, the greater motivation is Tokyo's need for plutonium for use in advanced fuel cycle programs.

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This memorandum was prepared at the request of Ambassador Gerard Smith, Department of State. Its authors are [redacted] the Office of Political Analysis, and [redacted] the Office of Scientific and Weapons Research. The paper was coordinated with the Special Assistant for Nuclear Proliferation Intelligence and the National Intelligence Officer for China-East Asia. Comments may be addressed to Chief, International Issues Division, OPA, [redacted] or Chief, Nuclear Energy Division, OSWR, [redacted]. Material available as of 10 July 1980 has been incorporated.

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Tokyo recognizes the importance of US efforts in the nonproliferation field and as a result of our initiatives has become more sensitive to the dangers inherent in the diffusion of sensitive nuclear technology. At the same time, it is more preoccupied than the United States with the issue of energy security and has felt constrained to challenge those elements of our nonproliferation policy that appear to threaten the establishment by Japan of an independent nuclear fuel cycle. Tokyo does not view this as one of its more serious differences with Washington. [REDACTED]

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The Japanese see a power reactor program as a critical part of their drive for greater energy independence. Because they import nearly 90 percent of their total energy needs, Tokyo feels particularly vulnerable to the vagaries of world energy supply. Japan depends primarily on the United States for the expansion of its nuclear power generating capacity, but it is actively seeking to diversify its sources of supply and to develop its own nuclear industries. [REDACTED]

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Programs designed to establish an independent Japanese nuclear fuel cycle include work being done on gas centrifuge and laser isotope enrichment of uranium, the advanced thermal reactor, the fast breeder, and spent fuel reprocessing. Near total reliance on imported uranium ores will continue to pose a problem, but the Japanese hope to improve their position by supplementing imports from Canada with major purchases of uranium from Australia. They have also shown interest in a joint project to locate an enrichment facility near the Australian mines. [REDACTED]

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As a country lacking almost all natural resources, Japan's efforts to develop reprocessing and fast breeder technology and facilities should be seen as the consequence of its desire to optimize the use of scarce materials. [REDACTED]

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A full-scale reprocessing program could reduce Japan's imports of uranium as much as 35 percent. Introduction of fast breeders would stretch the use of uranium by a factor of 50. For these reasons, Japan is firmly convinced that it needs to develop a source of plutonium to fuel the more efficient breeder and advanced thermal reactors that it believes are critical to ensure adequate power generation in the future. Hence, it is committed to a commercial-scale spent fuel reprocessing plant as well as to continuing the operation of the pilot-scale facility at Tokaimura, [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] While the need for plutonium is one key motivation behind the desire to reprocess on a larger scale, spent fuel management needs also play an important role. The problem of dealing with spent fuel in Japan is complicated by Japanese legal requirements and the uncertainty that surrounds reprocessing services offered by the West Europeans. [REDACTED]

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